

San Jose Rep opens 30th Anniversary Season with ‘Black Pearl Sings!’

by [SSC News Desk](#)

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San Jose Repertory Theatre kicks off its 30th Anniversary Season with the West Coast Premiere of *Black Pearl Sings!*, penned by Frank Higgins and directed by the Rep's Artistic Director Rick Lombardo. *Black Pearl Sings!* is the compelling musical drama that tells the story of two extraordinary women—a jailed African-American songstress and a Caucasian academic—whose fates become intertwined. Performances begin September 2nd and continue until September 26th.

"I'm so pleased to be directing this powerful, poetic and evocative new play by Frank Higgins to open this 30th Anniversary Season," states Lombardo. "When I first read this play over a year ago, I was struck by how this story of two strong-willed and truly unique women, from remarkably different backgrounds, demonstrates the power of music as a common language, and songs as a way to record our history. The songs sung in the show are, in turn, powerful, fun, bawdy and sweet, and take us on both an emotional and musical journey. This is an important new play, and I'm pleased we are able to introduce it to the Bay Area."



Can music transform pain into beauty and unite two strangers? Susannah (Jessica Wortham), an educated, career-obsessed white woman who works as an ethnomusicologist for the Library of Congress, is about to find out in her quest to find authentic, pre-slavery, African-American music. When she encounters Texas prisoner Pearl Johnson (Jannie Jones), an unlikely partnership develops between the street-smart Pearl and the ambitious Susannah. Susannah bargains for Pearl's parole and arranges for several public performances. It isn't long before Pearl is belting out radiant, soul-baring songs with the strength and beauty of the unaccompanied human voice. Fed by Pearl's African and enslaved foremothers, the songs remind us of the power of music to help heal in the struggle between our collective past and the desire for individual histories.

Frank Higgins, the playwright, is also the author of *The Sweet By 'n' By*, which was produced with Blythe Danner and Gwyneth Paltrow. His plays have been seen in New York and at the Williamstown Theater Festival, Jack O'Brien's Old Globe Theater, Ford's Theater in Washington, D.C., Kansas City Repertory Theater, The Barter Theater, Florida Studio Theater, Merrimack Repertory Theater, the Penumbra Theater, and the Fulton Opera House, among others. Among his other plays are *WMKS: Where Music Kills Sorrow*, *Gunplay*, and *Miracles*. He has also written several plays for young audiences, including *The Slave Dancer's Choice*, *Anansi the Spider* and *The Middle Passage*, and *The Country of the Blind*.

